New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1946

Volume VII, Number 2 • *Yearly Subscription $25.00* • Week of January 28, 1946

1946 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years
Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1945 Vol.

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
*Are You With It?	113
*Billion Dollar Baby	61
Brighten the Corner	74
*Carousel	226
*Day Before Spring (The)	92
*Deep Are the Roots	160
*Dream Girl	66
Dunnigan's Daughter	54
French Touch (The)	77
*Glass Menagerie (The)	234
*Hamlet	70
*Home of the Brave	51
Mermaids Singing (The)	86
Polonaise	149
*Pygmalion	57
*Red Mill (The)	141
Rugged Path (The)	109
*State of the Union	102
Strange Fruit	82
*Up in Central Park	280
You Touched Me	164

•

1944 Vol.

*Anna Lucasta	143
*Bloomer Girl	118
*Dear Ruth	56
*Follow the Girls	222
*Harvey	95
*I Remember Mama	111
*On the Town	45
*Song of Norway	149

•

1943 Vol.

*Oklahoma	341
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

•

1940 Vol.

*Life With Father	457

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 28, 1946.*

1946 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres During 1946
Reviews Appear in This Volume

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
Joy Forever (A)	493
*Magnificent Yankee (The)	477
*Nellie Bly	481
*O Mistress Mine	474
*Show Boat	496
*Winter's Tale (The)	486
*Would-Be Gentleman (The)	490

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 28, 1946.*

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THEATRE OPENINGS

"Nellie Bly"

"O Mistress Mine"

"The Magnificent Yankee"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, INC. : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"O Mistress Mine"

DAILY NEWS

JANUARY 24, 1946

Lunt & Fontanne Have Returned —So What Are You Waiting For?

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Why, da-arling! Guess what! Lynn and Alfred are back in town! You know—Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, silly. They are in a play called "O Mistress Mine" at the Empire Theatre and everybody just lo-oves it!

In the American theatre there have been some great teams. Montgomery & Stone, Chasen & Cook, Sears & Roebuck, Weber & Fields, Fay & Fay, Sothern & Marlowe and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe. There is no team with more luster than Lunt & Fontanne—he a simple Green Bay Packer and she a lass from London, and the both of them the da-arlings of America and Britain.

Last night's premiere was indeed an event, for the most celebrated married couple in the modern history of the stage returned from the war in Britain in a comedy which permitted them to make unmarried love to each other. The hallowed Empire was simply lousy with da-arlings who bade them veciferous welcome.

Their play is by Terence Rattigan. It begins with Miss Fontanne and Mr. Lunt living together in blissful sin. The setup is good because Mr. Lunt is a cabinet minister in charge of manufacturing tanks for the war, and cabinet ministers have good furniture.

The setup, however, is loused up by the arrival of Miss Fontanne's son, an adolescent radical. The son, being full of ideals and the literature of Harold Laski, disapproves of the whole mess and tells his mother that she must make a choice between her lover and him. She chooses her son—because otherwise there would not be a third act.

It all comes out all right, of course, and Lunt & Fontanne are on their way to holy wedlock by 11:05 P. M. You can't break up a team, unless you are Connie Mack.

All Okay at End.

Mr. Rattigan's comedy has nice bright lines and a delightful air of unreality. There is an uncommonly good performance by an ex-kid actor named Dick Van Patten, who last season was playing child stuff and called himself Dickie. Mr. Van Patten is growing up fast and growing up very well in the theatre, and I hope to goodness he stays here and does not flit off to the movies.

But the performances, of course, are those of Fontanne & Lunt. These two are superb play-actors. Their scheme of talking through each other's lines—and anybody else's lines—is sure-fire theatre. Their gestures — Alfred covering his face with his hands and Lynn delicately gnawing knuckles — are a trademark. Their way of talking along quietly and the nauddenly pitching a comedy line like Sammy Baugh throwing a quick one into the end zone is always a masterpiece of timing.

I think Lunt & Fontanne could make anything funny in a high-class sort of way. "O Mistress Mine" gives them enough room to work in. So, da-arling, I suppose you will be clawing your way into the Empire Theatre.

O MISTRESS MINE, a comedy in three acts, by Terence Rattigan. Staged by Alfred Lunt; settings by Robert Davison; Lynn Fontanne's gowns designed by Molyneaux; produced by the Theatre Guild and John C. Wilson. At the Empire Theatre.

Olivia Brown	Lynn Fontanne
Pollen	Margery Maude
Miss Dell	Esther Mitchell
Sir John Fletcher	Alfred Lunt
Michael Brown	Dick Van Patten
Diana Fletcher	Ann Lee
Miss Wentworth	Marie Paxton

SYNOPSIS—Act I: A house in Westminster, London, 1944. Act II: The same, four days later. Act III: A flat in Baron's Court, three months later.

New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 24, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

'O Mistress Mine' Brings Lunts in Their Funniest

Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt (I reverse the usual procedure of their billing) are back in town again in a new play. That should be news enough for many playgoers. That they are also back in the sweetest, funniest and most intelligent play of their entire career (which embrabes such funny ones as "The Taming of the Shrew" and some persiflage by Noel Coward) is not germane at the moment.

I shall not be surprised if the Young Communists Sodality and Marching Club, at the insistence of higher-ups, pickets the Empire Theater and the show in which Miss Fontanne and Mr. Lunt are now playing. For their new comedy, by Terance Rattigan, "O Mistress Mine," is not as respectful as it should be toward young Communists.

In fact, it is not as respectful as it should be toward some OLD Communists. For instance, it takes some unholy cracks at a man 55 years of age, Prof. Harold Joseph Laski.

Maybe the Lunts aren't quite aware of the fact, but Mr. Rattigan's play is rather too much toward the center to meet Comrade Stalin's requirements. Thus, by appearing in such a play, they may make trouble for themselves, for Mr. Rattigan, for the Theater Guild, for John C. Wilson, for Equity, for Mr. Petrillo, for the Stage Hands' Union and for me.

For I conceive it to be my duty to report to my customers that "O Mistress Mine" is a beautiful, tender, touching, hilarious comedy.

For this, I shall be denounced, along with the whole kaboodle connected with "O Mistress Mine" as reactionary.

Well, perhaps Miss Fontanne and Mr. Lunt and all the others are just that. But, as Mr. Lunt says in the play, when the commissars are living in the finest palaces and we are selling state-owned matches in the street, will some of New World gentlemen be kind enough to buy a package of matches from us, now and then? They only cost a kopeck, and we get half a kopeck on each sale.

I am getting to the age where I have an eye for young women and where my wife doesn't get as mad as she should when I openly admit that I have been carrying a torch for a young female named Lynn Fontaine ever since I first saw her in "A Pair of Petticoats."

Her husband, Mr. Lunt, is a good actor and director, but he stands between me and Lynn, so I can't care for him, personally.

But, even with that Lunt fellow in it, I think "O Mistress Mine" is a grand comedy. . . . By the way, it is about a dirty, fascistic, capitalistic reactionary (Mr. Lunt), whose company made good tanks for the British Empire in the last war but which Prof. Laski (or one of his associate daily workers) said, in print, ran better downhill than uphill and that he should resign as an unpaid member of the British Ministry of War.

Mr. Lunt, as well as I, could see the wisdom of the latter part of that accusation and so he resigned. But he had as mistress Miss Fontanne, (lucky fellow) whom he deeply loved. She had a son (Dick Van Patten) by her first husband. Dick didn't mind who picked up the check as long as he could spout Harold Laski, get himself a cushy job through the influence of Mr. Lunt and denounce the sin in which Mr. Lunt and Miss Fontanne lived.

Things were spoiled for me, at the very end, when Mr. Lunt, wearing the apron he used, I think, as dishwasher in the Stage-Door Canteen, made it up with that insufferable brat Dick Van Patten who, now that he is a year older, calls himself Dick instead of Dickey. Why couldn't Mr. Van Patten live up to his Laski principles? And why did Mr. Rattigan fix it up so that Miss Fontanne went back to that Lunt person?

But it is a play, not life itself. As such it is one that will live in my memory. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

New York Post

JANUARY 24, 1946

Incomparable Lunts Bring Magic to 'O Mistress Mine'

By VERNON RICE

Good old-fashioned magic returned to the theatre last night. Magic and fun and laughter. Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne are home again.

The pair are here again under the guidance of the Theatre Guild and John C. Wilson in Terence Rattigan's "O Mistress Mine," which they played last season in London and for the GIs on the continent under the title of "Love in Idleness." They could be playing there yet, both in London and on the continent, except they got a hankering for home.

From now on their address will be the Empire Theatre, and, if they so choose, their run in New York can be phenomenal, if the advance sale at the box-office is any guide.

I don't think it is a very good play. Frankly, I don't care. The Lunts could stand with their faces to the wall reciting the alphabet in pig Latin, and if they wanted me to laugh, I'd laugh. If it were tears they were after, I'd shed them. Just putty in their hands, that's me.

This I do know. "O Mistress Mine" is pure escapism.

True that the action of the play is set in London in 1944 and Mr. Lunt plays a minister of the British War Cabinet in charge of some manufacturing of tanks. But reduced to its very essentials, the plot contains very little except Boy has Girl, Boy loses Girl, Boy gets Girl.

What's wrong with that?

Why, nothing.

Except in this case, it is all a little too smooth, too polished and a little too unreal.

Four Years Gone

Olivia Brown, played by Miss Fontanne, is suddenly startled out of her comfortable complacency to find that she has to explain to her son, almost eighteen, unexpectedly returned from Canada after an absence of four years, that she is living with a man whom she loves but one to whom she is not married.

The son, though a liberal in politics, is not a liberal in some things. As a matter of fact, he is pretty much a nasty little prig, and anyway, he doesn't like the man.

Because of this antagonism, she leaves her lavish surroundings and goes to a drab, little flat and does the drab little things women are supposed to do in drab little flats.

Meanwhile, the son falls for a girl who is not above going to the Savoy; the boy is willing to forget that he is not supposed to like going to the Savoy, if that will win the girl, and the Cabinet Minister returns with a solution to the boy's problem and a proposal of marriage for the mother.

All this happens in that great land of make-believe, so I don't suppose one should question the ease with which the boy is won over or the rapidity with which political thinking goes out one door when love comes in another.

Mr. Rattigan has glossed this over with some of the brightest, wittiest dialogue that has been around for some time, Mr. Lunt has directed the comedy with taste and speed and Molyneaux has created some gowns that women will be gasping at for months to come.

And the Lunts, the incomparable Lunts, are wonderful.

Journal and American

JANUARY 24, 1946

Lunt-Fontanne Play Opens at the Empire

By ROBERT GARLAND

Here is where you read another rave review. You cannot help it. I cannot help it. I would not help it if I could. For this is Theatre. This is our big little world of make-believe at its most professional. This is Broadway at its most beguiling. This is the current showshop on its own. This is the life that is not earnest. This is the life that is not real. This, my escapist friends, is It.

And It is The Theatre Guild's and John C. Wilson's presentation of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne in Terence Rattigan's "O Mistress Mine," with settings by Robert Davison, direction by Mr. Lunt and gowns for Miss Fontanne by the Molyneaux who is credited by word of mouth during the unfolding of the play. It is a set-up for the memory-book and here are my bravos, here are my cheers for every page of it.

Look what was on display last night at the Empire Theatre. America's foremost acting team as stars. A supporting company worthy of them. An adult, intelligent and entertaining comedy by an adult, intelligent and established playwright. Two of New York's most dependable producers as sponsors. Skillful direction by the male member of the starred acting team. A cherished auditorium with good acoustics and traditions.

And the season's most notable first-nighters, expressing with sound and gesture their approval and appreciation.

• • •

Fine and Famous Fun

On its way to Broadway, 40th st. and last night's acclaim, "O Mistress Mine" has been known by other names. Overseas, in the blitzkrieged theatres of our allies and the far-flung camps of our brotherhood of fighters, it went by the name of "Love in Idleness." Later, in remote showshops of our land, it was, I think, "A Very Light Comedy" or something of the kind. Its new name becomes it well.

With the adultness, the intelligence and the entertainment which have been bespoken, it treats of the Olivia Brown and the Sir John Fletcher who are living in what used to be whispered about as sin. In his handsome house in London's Westminster, in the Summer of 1944, they are happily unhallowed until Olivia's exported son returns to confront their satisfied sinfulness. He disapproves!

Like most modernists who lean to the left without knowing exactly why they are leaning, Michael is a puritan. And a puritan is usually no little of a prig. Anyway, his mother's life and his mother's lover bring out the priggish puritan—or the puritanical prig—in him, and it is all Olivia, Sir John and Terence Rattigan can do to put the fear of God and the respect for mammon back into him.

It is fine, famous fun while going on, with wit, wisdom and well-doing flavoring the appetizing whole.

• • •

Long-Run Must-See

But most of all it is a showpiece in which Alfred Lunt can make effective use of his rare gifts as a comedian, in which Lynn Fontanne can make effective use of her rare gifts as his on-stage partner, and in which the combined arts of the modern theatre can be brought together in harmonious perfection. There are a thousand big and little attributes that go to make "O Mistress Mine" so rave-worthy.

Just to sit in the Empire's interior and watch the brittle beauty of the Lunt-Fontanne teamwork is, in itself, rewarding. Fitting the action to the word, the word to the action, their high comedic artistry is as beguiling as anything on Broadway. It is not real, it is not earnest. But it is the Theatre which, through the years, they have made so very much their own. Their own to share with you and me.

In that worthy supporting company is Dick van Patten, who brings a boyish likability to a priggish, puritanical part. Assisted at every turn by the Polton of Margery Maude, the Diana of Ann Lee, and the others, it is the unholy trio—Olivia, Sir John and Olivia's offspring—that accents the shining literacy of Mr. Rattigan's poised, mature and diverting entertainment. They add up to a show of shows...

So here ends another rave review. "O Mistress Mine" is Theatre with a big "T," a new long-run tenant for the Empire, a new must-see entertainment to get tickets for.

PM

JANUARY 25, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

The Lunts Sail Home in Style

PM Reviews

A smash hit has arrived on Broadway, this time without really bothering to be a play. Terence Rattigan has trimmed *O Mistress Mine* the way a gypsy trims a hat, and left the rest to the Lunts.

The rest, in a sense, goes without saying. Or rather, it has time and again been said. The Lunts are a wonderfully personal, wonderfully resourceful, wonderfully accomplished team who, besides making a lot of a lot, can make something of nothing and much of very little. It may even be that they are at their best as the waterwings for plays that cannot swim. Miss Fontanne, at least, is a good deal more rewarding in a *Mistress Mine* than in a *Sea Gull*. Even in *O Mistress Mine* it may be that she squeals and gurgles a little too much for a very dry taste. But there can be no question of the Lunts' enormous contribution to *O Mistress Mine*, of their enormous dexterity in it. Running the bases of entertainment, from burlesque and vaudevillism to light and even high comedy, they make the whole evening hum.

• • •

Mr. Lunt plays a Canadian industrialist turned wartime British cabinet minister in *O Mistress Mine*, and Miss Fontanne plays the attractive if not very brainy widow he loves and has been living with. Then the lady's son, a youth of 18 who has been away at school for five years, comes home. He is left-wing, priggish, and self-dramatizing, and he tacks a dispossess notice on his mother's Eden. Forced to choose, she chooses him. But there is a third act in which, along with a lot of horseplay, the young man is brought round and the couple brought to the altar.

Mr. Rattigan has taken every precaution to make all this as unreal as possible. He has written scenes in every conceivable style, and the Lunts play the spots off all of them—except for one or two quasi-serious scenes that are virtually unplayable. Mr. Rattigan's dialogue does not sparkle very often, but most of it is serviceable enough. He knows how to tweak his young left-winger so as to rouse the carriage trade to glee. He can spin out telephone nonsense for Miss Fontanne, business about dinner at the Savoy for Mr. Lunt, and plenty of featherweight give-and-take for them both.

In extremely fast company, Dick Van Patten does an unequal but in general very creditable job as the son. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

The New York Times

JANUARY 24, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

The Lunts are wonderful people, and they are back again. They came like a whirlwind to the Empire last evening, sweeping through Terence Rattigan's "O Mistress Mine." For a year or so they had been absent in London, doing this new comedy among other things, and the return of the natives obviously was one of the things for which the theatre had been waiting. The Lunts never have been better, gayer, more amusing. One swallow may not make a summer, but two Lunts can throw a great deal of weight on the credit side of what has not always been a good season. The welcome mat has been set out to good purpose this time.

• • •

"O Mistress Mine" is their show, of course. That is inevitable, and it may be said of Mr. Rattigan that he has politely stepped out of their way. He has set up a framework of a British Cabinet Minister who is contentedly living with a widow, unable to divorce his own wife because of his position. Back from Canada, aged 17, comes the widow's son with radical ideas and no high regard for either the Minister or the irregular life at home. Choosing between her two gentlemen, the lady retires to an apartment with her son until that worthy, growing up a bit and himself meeting a girl, begins to see that even the holder of a Cabinet position can be human.

As a play, Mr. Rattigan's part of the evening is inconsequential—if that is not even building it up a little. It is filled with flaws, implausibilities and occasional moments when one of the Lunts is off the stage. That means nothing for very long. Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne are playing for comedy rather than thought. They build up to jokes, snap their fingers, and the jokes seem hilarious. They take part of "O Mistress Mine" as high comedy, part as farce, and they as not too high above burlesque to use that on occasion. In a curtain speech after last evening's performance, Mr. Lunt said that he thought he now was old enough to break a rule against curtain speeches; that he hoped play had entertained a little in a troubled world. It had.

Although "O Mistress Mine" is the Lunts' play by virtue of all the virtues, there are others in it. The part of the boy is acted by Dick van Patten, who used to be Dickie as a child actor and now has grown into fierce young manhood. He is serious and intense; some of the best passages are where the minister knows the boy as a viper and the widow knows him not at all. Esther Mitchell is the secretary and Ann Lee the cabinet member's wife who will not immdiately divorce him. Mr. Lunt has directed, presumably part of the time over the breakfast table, where a family of two actors best can work out the business at hand. Playing together, the Lunts know all the shadings, all the right mannerisms, and they use them naturally and instinctively.

The theatre is cheerful again. The Lunts are back, and it will be for a long time.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JANUARY 24, 1946

By HOWARD BARNES

The Lunts Triumphant!

ALFRED LUNT and Lynn Fontanne are back on Broadway in "O Mistress Mine" and it is an occasion for bell-ringing. It is not much of a show that they have brought with them from London. Terence Rattigan's comedy is on the expedient, not to say spavined, side. But the great acting couple takes over in such brilliant bravura fashion at the Empire that the production becomes a consummate demonstration of make-believe. Thespis is a shuttlecock in this bright new offering, with Lunt and Miss Fontanne batting it around in what can only be called the great manner of the theater. To miss their performances would be to deprive one's self of a delectable evening of entertainment.

• • •

For the stars have never been more assured than they are in this work which they played in buzz-bombed London during the war and before countless soldier audiences. Rattigan has given them a plot set-up which employs their talents to the full, no matter how rickety it is in structure. Portraying a cabinet minister and his somewhat moral mistress, who separate briefly when the latter's adolescent son barges into the scene, they dot their dramatic i's cross their dramatic t's with exquisite nicety. Since there is enough genuine fun in the work to give it a semblance of continuous comedy, they pull off a tour-de-force of canny performing. The play's not the thing at the Empire It's the Lunts.

• • •

Whatever the author had in mind when he wrote "O Mistress Mine" has become strictly the property of the chief players. Miss Fontanne can keep a scene fascinating by merely making idle telephone calls to her friends, or pounding a typewriter after her stage son has convinced her to mend her ways. Lunt can take mere wisps of a script and come up with a hilarious impersonation of a bedeviled Cabinet minister, even to becoming the mentor of the boy who has broken up a pleasant extramarital arrangement. Together, Lunt and Fontanne make the stage electric with excitement and amusement, keeping an innocent onlooker waggling his head as if at a championship tennis match.

• • •

There is little need to go into the exposition. Suffice it to say that minister and mistress are parted briefly by the radical youngster who fancies himself in a Hamlet role and that they get together felicitously before the ending. Dick Van Patten does well in the part of the irksome lad and Ann Lee has a fine bit as the wife of the Cabinet minister who is summoned to his mistress's abode by her supposedly well meaning son. Marie Paxton and Margery Maude add just the seasoning needed for a strong dish of acting. Lunt has mixed the comedy artfully in his direction, while the Theater Guild and John C. Wilson have seen to it that the production befits the doings. The Lunts are having a field day at the Empire.

The Sun

JANUARY 24, 1946

Lunt and Fontanne Are Back and Quite Wonderful in 'O Mistress Mine.'

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

If the drowsy Wisconsin hamlet of Genesee Depot had a newspaper the Personals department would be brightened today with such an item as this: "Our neighbors, the Lunts, returned to Broadway last night in a comedy called 'O Mistress Mine' and they were a real success." And indeed they were!

Yes, they're back, Alfred and Lynn of the twenty-year play-acting partnership, and they have brought to the stage of the Empire a slight, light skimpy comedy, written by Terence Rattigan. By the sheer magic of their team-playing they make an evening of it, a show of it—and almost a play of it. The Empire has its first hit since "Life With Father" packed up and moved to the north.

Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, gone from our stage for several seasons, contribute arch, airy, highly polished and completely enchanting performances to the comedy in which they appeared in London during those unnerving months of the buzz bombs and the rockets and with which they later went on a continental tour. They now come into the Empire under the guidance of the Theater Guild and John C. Wilson. And there's cause for general rejoicing.

If Terence Rattigan hasn't written a good play he has at least devised one that gives us a lot of the Lunts, and being that they're in very fine form, the young London dramatist has performed a definite service.

The locale of his "O Mistress Mine" is London in wartime. Alfred Lunt's role is that of Sir John Fletcher, an industrialist, who is serving as a Cabinet Minister, engaged in tank production. Miss Fontanne plays Olivia Brown, an attractive widow. Sir John is married and separated. He hasn't sought a divorce because of his government post and he and Olivia, devoted to each other, have been living together in his luxurious Westminster apartment for three years. Trouble begins when Olivia's son, now nearly 18, who was evacuated to Canada, returns to London.

Young Michael is quite a boy—arrogant, outspoken, given to self-pity and self-dramatization. He is a forward-thinking leftist but also a moralist and refuses to accept the situation when he learns of the relationship between his mother and Sir John. Michael's antagonism forces Olivia to make a decision and she walks out on her fancy setup and goes to live with the boy in the drabness of a Baron's Court flat. But the wily Sir John isn't one to take a defeat, he resorts to trickery to win her back, and is helped along considerably by the discovery that young Michael is having trouble with a romance of his own.

Playwright Rattigan just about runs out of play midway in the second act. He has a time putting together a third. But he has written some smooth dialogue into "O Mistress Mine" and he has the remarkable Lunts to speak his words, play his scenes—and save his play.

It's a seven-character comedy, the Empire's new piece, but only three of them count. Dick Van Patten plays the rebellious Michael, the adolescent Hamlet, and he moves right along with the stars. He has force and a sense of comedy values and his scenes with Lunt are enormously amusing. Margery Maude, Esther Mitchell, Ann Lee and Marie Paxon are also in the play—but briefly.

Lunt and Fontanne, the foremost man-and-wife acting team the theater has known in this century, are quite wonderful in "O Mistress Mine." They give life and sustained entertainment to a scanty comedy, and last night's audience was the happiest I've found in a playhouse since "State of the Union" came this way.

****

"The Magnificent Yankee"

New York Herald Tribune

JANUARY 23, 1946

By HOWARD BARNES

Magnificent

THE theater has composed a portrait of great breadth, dignity and feeling in "The Magnificent Yankee." Emmet Lavery's stage biography of Mr. Justice Holmes is obviously episodic and static, but it is instinct with honesty and dramatic perception. Louis Calhern plays the great jurist and liberal with taste and gusto, while Arthur Hopkins has produced and staged the new play at the Royale with infinite care. Since the action stretches from 1902, when Oliver Wendell Holmes was appointed to the Supreme Court, to 1933, when a newly inaugurated President Roosevelt called on the philosopher of democracy in retirement, it is a fascinating study of a period as well as of a man.

* * *

Lavery has acknowledged his indebtedness to Francis Biddle for the use of material from the latter's biography, but that does not lessen his achievement. Dealing with one of the most difficult of dramatic forms, the author has set his pace slowly and then moved so surely that "The Magnificent Yankee" has a tremendous burden of meaning and feeling before the final curtain. Isolated fragments in the career and private life of the central figure fit together with beautiful precision. The surrounding characters, particularly that of Mrs. Holmes, are brilliantly delineated and portrayed, but they serve chiefly to reflect the commanding figure of an eloquent and authentic American. At times, Lavery has stumbled a bit in tracing a philosopher's progress, but on the whole he has done a masterful job.

* * *

The drama starts leisurely enough with the veteran of the Civil War looking over his new house in Washington, after his appointment to the bench by President Theodore Roosevelt. It introduces such figures as Henry Adams, Owen Wister and, of course, Mr. Justice Brandeis, as it comes down the years through 1911, 1916, 1921, 1929 to the final scene. Occasional scenes show a great legal mind at work in shaping law to a changing civilization. Most of them depict a very human and lovable gentleman from Boston, who makes his secretaries his spiritual sons, likes his Rabelais and sherry, lives richly with his wife and struggles valiantly with the deep and eternal problems of personal existence.

* * *

Calhern is said to have never met Mr. Justice Holmes. Neither did your reviewer. But to all dramatic intents and purposes he fills the role brilliantly. There are a couple of decades in which he does not age perceptibly, but he is eloquent, assured and particularly Yankee. It is a remarkably fine performance, which does honor to a fine stage biography. Dorothy Gish is lovely and restrained as Mrs. Holmes; Edgar Barrier gives an excellent impersonation of Mr. Justice Brandeis and Sherling Oliver is right as can be as Wister. The secretaries, a long string of them, are played to perfection and the scene in which they sing to the jurist on his eightieth birthday is extremely touching. Hopkins has directed the play to maintain a nice balance between a biography and its inevitable overtones. "The Magnificent Yankee" is a play to remember.

'THE MAGNIFICENT YANKEE.'

Play by Emmet Lavery; staged by Arthur Hopkins; setting and costumes designed by Woodman Thompson; presented by Arthur Hopkins at the Royale Theater, Tuesday evening, January 22, 1946. The cast:

Dixon	Mason Curry
Mr. Justice Holmes	Louis Calhern
Fanny Dixwell Holmes	Dorothy Gish
Henry Adams	Fleming Ward
Cofeland	Christopher Marvin
Mason	Nicholas Saunders
Mary	Eleanor Swayne
Mr. Palmer	William Roerick
Owen Wister	Sherling Oliver
Northrop	Philip Truex
Hamilton	Robert Healy
Mr. Justice Brandeis	Edgar Barrier
Mapes	Grey Stafford
Rogers	Edward Hudson
Jackson	Edwin Whitner
Halloran	Bruce Bradford

SYNOPSIS: The entire action takes place in the library of Mr. Justice Holmes. Act I, Scene 1, An afternoon in December, 1902; Scene 2, An afternoon in March, 1903. Act II, Scene 1, An evening in March, 1911; Scene 2, An afternoon in June, 1916; Scene 3, An evening in March, 1921. Act III, Scene 1, An afternoon in January, 1929; Scene 2, The afternoon of March 4, 1933.

The New York Times

JANUARY 23, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

In "The Magnificent Yankee," which opened at the Royale last evening, Emmet Lavery is casting a playwright's eye on the life of the late Justice Holmes. The ninety-four-year span of the great dissenter should be a required study of this day, and indeed it has been so in many books, but it may possibly lie outside the confines of the stage. At all events, Mr. Lavery has not written a play to equal his subject, and even an outstanding performance by Louis Calhern in the leading role fails to make it completely successful.

* * *

In dramatizing that section of Justice Holmes' life which ran between the two Roosevelts, Mr. Lavery had a choice of courses. Building a play on the workings of a stalwart and firm mind is difficult dramaturgy, and so the author has subordinated the dissenting opinions in favor of the Holmeses' life together and their personal relationships. "The Magnificent Yankee" bears a family resemblance to "Life With Father," to "What Every Woman Knows," but both of them tell the story better. Justice Holmes must have been different from Father Day; he perhaps did not rely on Mrs. Holmes to give him the words of decisions and be all but an ex-officio member of the court.

In his wish to show a happy life —which the Justice's undoubtedly was—Mr. Lavery has not avoided a number of tricks the dissenter, himself, would have scorned. He has thrown in so many sentimental passages that the voice of the Rosika Schwimmer decision, the lover of P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves, have been lost in a purple mist. Once or twice during the evening, when Mr. Lavery lets his character breathe freely, there are good lines and nice touches; they are not continuous, however. Meeting the late Justice Holmes for the first time at "The Magnificent Yankee," a visitor from over yonder would end with a sense of puzzlement that here was the home-working of one of the country's greatest minds.

* * *

Mr. Calhern is all to the good, however. Since the play opens with Justice Holmes' appointment in 1902 and runs to Inaugural Day in 1933, when President Roosevelt paid a call, the actor must change his style and appearance. He starts as the young justice of sixty-one, goes through vigorous middle age, ends as a man who is a little forgetful, is tired, but is the soldier still. Dorothy Gish, as Mrs. Holmes, also makes a complete character, the apparently easy-natured woman who rules the Justice with kindness but firmly. Fleming Ward has the part of Henry Adams, who always is crying down disaster, Sherling Oliver is Owen Wister, Edgar Barrier is Justice Brandeis. The Holmeses had no children, and instead the Justice adopted secretaries for a year each; there are many of them for brief parts in the play. Arthur Hopkins, the producer, directed, the library setting being by Woodman Thompson.

New York Post

JANUARY 23, 1946

Calhern and Gish Triumph In New Play at the Royale

By VERNON RICE

It is good to hear shouts of "Bravo!" in the theatre again. It is even better to have a play and performances worthy of those cheers.

Finally one came along at the Royale last night to make the audience seated after the final curtain to cheer Emmet Lavery's "The Magnificent Yankee," and its stars, Louis Calhern and Dorothy Gish.

It isn't a big play and probably not a great play but it is a play rich in warmth and sentiment and human emotions.

Possibly it could be said that it is no play at all, but a series of episodes showing the human side of a great man and a great American. It is a visit in the Washington home of the late Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes from the time of his arrival in the Capital in 1902 until the day he proudly receives the late President Roosevelt in his home after the latter's inauguration in 1933.

We see him through the years. We get intimate glimpses of him as he hires his secretaries, the bright young men out of Harvard Law School whom he kept for only a year; we help him prepare a speech for his 50th class reunion, we join him in his 80th birthday anniversary, we visit with his friends, Owen Wister and Justice Brandeis, and we share his antipathy for Henry Adams.

But above all, we are made to feel the deep love and understanding he had for his wife, Fanny Dixwell Holmes, and the devotion she had for him. Their every thought was for the other, not in the movie sense, but in the true, human sense.

Credit should be given to Mr. Lavery for the restraint and good taste he used in the writing of their scenes together. There was complete absence of phony sentiment. The playwright is also to be congratulated in making the real words of the late Justice an integral part of the dialogue; not something lifted out of the pages of history, emphasized and made to sound like a portion of a class day oration.

It is difficult to talk about the play without talking about its stars, Louis Calhern and Dorothy Gish. And it is difficult to talk about one without mentioning the other, because both were almost constantly on the stage and because so beautifully did they play together. Not only was it a triumph for each player as an individual, but it was also a triumph for Mr. Calhern and Miss Gish as an acting team. They were Justice and Mrs. Holmes. Nothing more need be said.

Arthur Hopkins, who produced the work, directed with a sensitive hand and a loving heart. Woodman Thompson's one set and costumes aided immeasurably in atmosphere and mood.

"The Magnificent Yankee" is the "Victoria Regina" of America. As a study of a portion of a man's life, it becomes a study of a portion of our history, and the greatness that is America is understood, because it is capable of producing such men as Justice Holmes.

PM

JANUARY 24, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

A Pale Picture Of a Great Man

PM Reviews

There is something appealing in the *idea* of a play about Justice Holmes. Particularly at this turn of time, when Broadway can do with a little borrowed stature, and this nation with the echo of a courageous and disinterested voice. Furthermore, Holmes' personality always seemed as attractive as his mind and opinions were challenging. Even more than he was a magnificent Yankee, and perhaps even more exceptionally, he was a very human one. You can understand Emmet Lavery's desire to transfer him, in all his magnificence and all his humanity, to the stage. But despite Louis Calhern's able acting, the transfer is not effective enough.

Biographical plays, being frankly a bastard form, are not to be judged as art; are not even, perhaps, to be too sharply scrutinized as "plays." But they have to qualify as something—as an exercise in communication, as an evening in the theater. They have to have impact and variety. *The Magnificent Yankee* fails to qualify on just those grounds. It has too little impact and even less variety. The trouble is not that Mr. Lavery has concentrated on the man rather than the jurist. The trouble is that he hasn't given the man free play or full stature; and that, by making him "human," he has made him very little else. Not even, I would say, really interesting.

* * *

Mr. Lavery tells his story in seven scenes. They span 31 years of Holmes' life in Washington, from his arrival there at 61 to join the Supreme Court, to his being visited, at 92, by the Franklin Roosevelt who has just been inaugurated. Time romps along in lustrums. History squeezes in here and there: T. R. growls at a distance, there is the ruckus over the Brandeis appointment, there is mention of the Abrams case, the Rosika Schwimmer case. But the theme and essential content of the play is the relationship between Holmes and his wife. Mr. Lavery has painted an unabashedly sentimental picture of a devoted couple, even though he has exploited the *Life With Father* humor of a quietly dominating wife. There is, I think, too much of all this—whether as theater or as biography. There is also something too overt about it. It makes no use of the power of suggestion, of the value of leaving things unsaid, so that it never becomes really touching.

For the rest, Mr. Lavery has introduced a few real-life characters (including a remarkably unreal Brandeis) and a few small recur-

ring motifs—Holmes' many secretaries, his eye for a good-looking woman, the cantankerous Adams family. These are pleasant enough humorous devices, but they pall. Henry Adams, with his jubilant croakings of disaster, is a constant doorbell-ringer—a piece of dramatic license that would have horrified the old gentleman who remained so ostentatiously immured in his Lafayette Square house.

* * *

There are pleasant flurries of talk in *The Magnificent Yankee*, and occasional entertaining episodes. But, though the play could not be dramatic, need it have been quite so domestic? Certainly there might have been sharper talk, and a finer airing of Holmes' mind. As it is, whatever sustained interest the play possesses comes from Mr. Calhern's performance. It is a performance that has point and wit and vocal skill as well as the right physical characteristics. Dorothy Gish makes a thoroughly likeable Mrs. Holmes, which is all the part admits of. The minor roles range from adequate down. Mr. Thompson's set (using crudely painted book-fronts in Justice Holmes' library!) seems to me highly unattractive.

—Louis Kronenberger

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New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 23, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

'The Magnificent Yankee' Entertaining Biography

"The Magnificent Yankee," by Emmet Lavery, which Arthur Hopkins presented at the Royale last night, is the consummate achievement in the acting lives of Louis Calhern and Dorothy Gish.

Don't mistake me: this is an absolutely beautiful job on the part of these two. And the play has passages of brilliant wit, continuity of interest, and is of definite value to those who would like to go back and re-examine the whole point of view of Mr. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.

I suppose I am not making myself clear. But, if you are interested in good acting, you should see what magnificent jobs Mr. Calhern and Miss Gish perform.

Their timing of speech is perfect. They graduate, on the stage, from 1902 until March 4, 1933, and thus give you 31 years of the married life of the Holmes with charm, beauty and almost perfect attention to make-up. (I say, "almost perfect," only because, from the rear, Mr. Calhern's final white wig looks like a wig and could be combed down a bit, so it would look less so.)

Poor Supporting Cast.

If you are interested in bad acting, you should see the play also. For, omitting Mr. Calhern and Miss Gish, you have never seen worse acting in your life. One would think that Mr. Hopkins, Mr. Lavery and Edgar Barrier had a violent prejudice against the late Mr. Justice Louis Brandies, so smug, stuffy and phony altogether is that enlightened liberal jurist made out to be. The many who served Mr. Justice Holmes as secretaries should protest that they were not the Klaw and Erlanger chorus men that the play reports them as being.

There are many of us who worshiped Mr. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, because he was one of the few lawyers we had ever read who could write understandable English. Most lawyers, conditioned by their early training, can't write a paragraph without quoting five people and appending from three to 11 footnotes.

'What Works Is Good?'

The solemn truth is, much as I love the late Justice's literary style and enjoy the idea that when he was nearly 80, he liked to consider himself a rip with the women and delighted in French yellowbacks of an erotic nature, mystery stories and vaudeville he may have been responsible for the most dangerous doctrine the United States can adopt. As I see it now his essential theory was a perversion of the William James' theory that "what works is good." That was Hitler's theory; and the truth is that it was also the legal theory of Mr. Justice Holmes and of Mr. Justice Louis Brandeis.

There isn't the space to argue the point; and a drama must stand or fall by its entertainment value. "The Magnificent Yankee" is entertaining, thanks to Mr. Calhern and Miss Gish, with a few assists from the author and the director.

DAILY NEWS

JANUARY 23, 1946

'Magnificent Yankee' a Beautiful Piece of Sentimental Biography

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I left the Royale Theatre last night in a glow of thankfulness and with a comfortable, warm feeling for the world. I was thankful that Arthur Hopkins, a gentleman of discrimination, had returned as a producing manager. I was thankful that Emmet Lavery had written "The Magnificent Yankee," and that Louis Calhern and Dorothy Gish were playing Mr. Justice and Mrs. Oliver Wendell Holmes. And, in unreasonable conceit—as though it were my very own doing—I was thankful for being an American, and in my pride felt very generous toward everything and everybody.

Not Much Plot.

A play which can stir up this much stuff in any one spectator must be quite a play—and so it is. But when you sit and look back upon it you discover it isn't much of a play at all, as dramas go. There isn't any plot, because there isn't any conflict. It just dawdles along, telling about a man who was appointed a justice of the Supreme Court of the United States in 1902; a man who was so noble a person that, 31 years later, a new President paid the homage of making a call one scant hour after the President's inauguration.

In this play there is comment on politics, yes; but no politics. Names like Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, Taft and Wilson figure, and there are characters representing Justice Louis Brandies, novelist Owen Wister and Henry Adams. Brandeis and Holmes, the two dissenters, talk a bit about important things, like the Schwimmer case. But these names, people and cases are incidents and never dramatically important.

Two Fine People.

The only important thing about "The Magnificent Yankee" is that it is about a magnificent Yankee—and his magnificent wife, and their love one for the other. Mr. Calhern and Miss Gish have given these characters inspiring decency and great tenderness. Their spoken words of affection are few and mostly bantering, but as they play the roles and as Mr. Lavery has written them the unspoken love story engenders deep emotion.

There is humor, of course; quiet, unforced humor, for Justice Holmes and his wife were Yankees indeed. There is a beautifully conceived and presented sentimental scene in which all of Mr. Holmes' bright young men from Harvard—the secretaries he had year by year—come to congratulate him upon his 80th birthday. There is always a feeling of pride in this country—as when Mr. Holmes bequeathes the bulk of his estate quite simply to the United States of America. And there is heart-wrenching pathos when the justice and his wife face the fact that she is dying and, each in his own way, try to reason it out.

Miss Gish and Mr. Calhern give the finest performances I have ever seen them in. She is a delight and a darling. He, besides looking astonishingly like the real Holmes, displays admirable reticence, never once overdoing the Boston accent or the advancing feebleness of an aging man. Together they make the love story of two old people a thing of extraordinary charm.

Mr. Hopkins directed, of course—and with him something the stage has sorely missed has returned. The supporting company is a nice one, and Woodman Thompson's library set gives the proper atmosphere.

The Sun

JANUARY 23, 1946

'Magnificent Yankee' Sketchy Play, With Fine Performance by Louis Calhern.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

That distinguished producer, Arthur Hopkins, began his season last night at the Royale—began it with "The Magnificent Yankee," which brings forth a performance deserving of cheers, but the play itself is quite another matter. Emmet Lavery's study of the life of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes is a sketchy and wavering stage piece, one of high purpose, but also one that never develops cumulative strength.

"The Magnificent Yankee" is a leisurely character study and the author has brought to it moments of warmth and poignancy. In total effect, however, it is a drama too episodic to be first-rate theater, and it's also one almost entirely lacking in dramatic progression. Somewhat in compensation for a not too skillful job of playwriting, there is a rewarding performance from Louis Calhern in the title role.

Justice Holmes, in Lavery's stage portrait, is depicted as a man of wisdom and humanity, dry wit, independence, urbanity and profundity. The play covers three decades in his life beginning with his arrival in Washington after being appointed to the Supreme Court by Theodore Roosevelt in 1902 and finishing on the day of Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inauguration in March of 1333.

In three acts and seven scenes "The Magnificent Yankee" reveals the deep and abiding love of Justice Holmes for the woman to whom he was married for more than half a century. It presents him holding forth on matters great and small, from anti-trust laws to the beauty of women. It reveals his differences with Theodore Roosevelt, his affection for the procession of young Harvard men who serve him as secretaries, his respect for Justice Brandeis, his delight in reminiscense of Civil War soldiering. But the play rambles along and never becomes the soaring biographical drama that the author set out to write.

Perhaps the most effective moments in "The Magnificent Yankee" are those at the very end when Justice Holmes, at 92, desolate over the loss of his devoted wife and now aging, feeble, tremulous and gallant, rises to his full height and to all his great dignity to receive at his home an unprecedented caller—the new President of the United States. The play closes on this picture.

Arthur Hopkins chose wisely in selecting Louis Calhern for the part of Justice Holmes. Calhern gives a characterization of insight, skill and believability and he does more for the part in his playing than the author did in writing it. Dorothy Gish is quite splendid as the managing, patient, understanding Fanny Dixwell Holmes. Edgar Barrier gives a convincing portrayal of that other dissenter, Justice Brandeis. There are good contributions from Fleming Ward as the complaining Henry Adams, Sherling Oliver as Owen Wister (author of "The Virginian") and Philip Truex as one of the secretaries.

Woodman Thompson's setting, the library in the Holmes house, is in good taste. Arthur Hopkins has given the play careful and competent direction and a worth while production. Emmet Lavery's play has dignity but it remains a rather unimpressive job, falling short of being satisfactory and full-bodied biographical drama.

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Journal American

JANUARY 23, 1946

'Magnificent Yankee' Opens at the Royale

By ROBERT GARLAND

The main trouble with these biographical plays is that they're so biographical. "The Magnificent Yankee," which arrived as recently as yesterday at the Royale Theatre, isn't a whole lot different from the others. Which is to report that Playwright Emmet Lavery has removed the high spots from, say, Francis Biddle's "Mr. Justice Holmes" and Catherine Bowen's "Yankee From Olympus" and dressed them up in dialog.

Having dressed them up in dialog, Mr. Lavery—or maybe Arthur Hopkins, the producer—has handed them over to such biography-minded mummers as Louis Calhern and Dorothy Gish, each of whom can act circles around a celebrity at the mere signing of a contract. They did this very thing not long ago down at the Empire, where their Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Day added to the longevity of "Life With Father."

Now, in "Life With Wendell"—or, begging Playwright Lavery's pardon, "The Magnificent Yankee"—they again grow old together. Only, nowadays, up at the Royale, Mr. Calhern outstays Miss Gish by one of the seven scenes. According to Broadway's new biography, Mr. Justice Holmes was a worn and weary widower in 1933, although history books go on to tell how he managed to survive Mrs. Holmes until two years later.

He died, and was buried with honors in Arlington, in 1935.

* * *

Life With Wendell

In his real, his off-stage existence, Oliver Wendell Holmes, the great American jurist, son of Oliver Wendell Holmes, the autocrat of the breakfast table, was born in Boston in 1841, attended Harvard, served in the Union Army during the War between the States, was admitted to the bar, taught law, was Associate Justice, then Chief Justice, of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts before moving to Washington.

It is there, in 1902, that Emmet Lavery introduces him as "The Magnificent Yankee." It is from there, and then, that Mr. Lavery carries him forward through three unexciting decades to the Inauguration Day in 1933 on which we leave him, standing shakily in the handsome library provided by Woodman Thompson, waiting for the new President of the United States—Franklin Delano Roosevelt—to get off his private elevator.

From the afternoon in December, 1902, when "The Magnificent Yankee" picks him up, until the afternoon in March, 1933, when "The Magnificent Yankee" puts him down, the new play at the Royale manages to touch the distinguished career of its distinguished subject only on the surface. Surely, the life and times of the second Oliver Wendell Holmes were not as humdrum as Mr. Lavery makes them. No great man's could be!

Not in Washington, with Theodore Roosevelt in the White House!

* *

Cheers for Louis

With his flair for actorial biography, Louis Calhern comes right royally to the rescue of the second Oliver Wendell Holmes. Thanks to the playacting of Mr. Calhern, rather than to the playmaking Mr. Lavery, the celebrated jurist up on the stage in 45th st. takes on no little of the magnificence of his designation. I don't believe the playacting Mr. Calhern has ever been more worthy. Not even in "The Great Big Doorstep"!

And Dorothy Gish, looking amazingly like her admiring grey-haired mother sitting in the second row, is a fine Fanny Dixwell to his Oliver Wendell. But, from curtain rise to curtain fall, "The Magnificent Yankee" is "Life With Wendell," a fact of which Miss Gish is quite obviously aware. The evening at the Royale is Louis Calhern's evening; the applause and the bravos are Mr. Calhern's well earned due.

Apart from the unconvincing Owen Wister of Sherling Oliver, the minor characters in "The Magnificent Yankee" are mostly one secretary after another. The best of the lot is the secretary of Philip Truex. Fleming Ward is a counter-irritating Henry Adams, Edgar Barrier is a stuffy Louis Brandeis, and the new piece at the Royale is a serviceable vehicle for the high actorial endeavors of Louis Calhern and Dorothy Gish.

Whisper it not in Sardi's, but "The Magnificent Yankee" leans toward the tedious!

"Nellie Bly"

The New York Times

JANUARY 22, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

After tryout alarms and excursions suggesting the birth of a most unhappy foundling, the musical "Nellie Bly" arrived last evening at the Adelphi. The walk here this morning must cover more of the same ground, for it is not a stroll on the sunny side of the street. The Nat Karson and Eddie Cantor production is one of those despairing shows which never get moving, which seldom do much more than shuffle vaguely from one foot to another. The music is rather lifeless, the book a potpourri without sparkle, and while one of the most likable teams in the business—William Gaxton and Victor Moore—are in it, their talents are not enough. Nellie's travels must have been more exciting.

* * *

Joseph Quillan is credited with the story, the idea being from history. Nellie Bly was the newspaper woman who went around the world to beat the eighty-day trip of Jules Verne's Phineas Fogg. Since the world is in the public domain these days, Mr. Quillan and his associates allowed themselves quite a field. They settled for the obvious, unfortunately; their incidents take place in Paris (jokes), a harem (veils), Russia (colorful costumes). Since Nellie is only a woman and musical comedy is not only distaff, they set up a rival tourist and a newspaper man to bumble on the one hand, and to pay court on the other. The world tour resembles nothing so much as a tour of other musical shows, not all of them the best.

Mr. Moore is the rival world-circler. With a normal job of stabling the Hoboken ferry, he suddenly finds himself traveling for The Herald, with Mr. Gaxton, as managing editor of that paper, to guide him. The idea has great possibilities for imagination, but no one cares to do much about it. Mr. Moore finds himself involved in matters which he might better just brush off the face of the globe and Mr. Gaxton has little chance for the bounce which usually is his. A late courier from the Adelphi reports that in a final number, a duet called "Harmony," the team is united in the spirit that was of the old days; what preceded, for the most part was not.

Nellie is played by Joy Hodges, who has verve and spirit, but casual material; and Benay Venuta is the musical's toughie, in this case a lady saloon-keeper called Battle Annie. Miss Venuta can rasp out a song with the best of them, but better lyrics would help, along with better music. This last was written by James van Heusen, with lyrics by Johnny Burke, and probably none of the tunes will win the renown given the composer by virtue of his movie work. Mr. Karson designed the production and Edward Caton and Lee Sherman the dances, which are not out of the ordinary. The Debonairs deserve a note by themselves; they seem to be having a good time and their moments on the stage are cheerful.

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NELLIE BLY, a musical comedy in two acts and eighteen scenes. Book by Joseph Quillan, lyrics by Johnny Burke and music by James Van Heusen. Choreography by Edward Caton and Lee Sherman; dialogue staged by Edgar MacGregor; scenery, costumes and lighting by Nat Karson; musical supervision, Joseph Lilley; orchestra conductor, Charles Drury; produced by Mr. Karson and Eddie Cantor. At the Adelphi Theatre.

Pulitzer	Walter Armin
Bennett	Edward H. Robins
Newsboy	William O'Shay
Frank Jordan	William Gaxton
Ferry Captain	Fred Peters
Deckhand	Harold Murray
Phineas T. Fogarty	Victor Moore
First Reporter	Robert Strauss
Murphy	Artella Dickson
Wardheeler	Jack Vseth
Second Reporter	Larry Stuart
Third Reporter	Eddy Di Genova
Nellie Bly	Joy Hodges
Battle Annie	Benay Venuta
Steward	Larry Stuart
Honeymoon Couple	Doris Eward, Jack Vseth
French Girl	Drucilla Strain
Grisette	Lubov Roudenko
French Dandy	Jack Whitney
French Mayor	Walter Armin
Santos Dumont	Fred Peters
Reporters	The Debonairs
Czar	Walter Armin
Russian Captain	Fred Peters
First Sheik	Robert Strauss
Second Sheik	Edward H. Robins
Third Sheik	Larry Stuart
Official	Harold Murray
Copyrgirl	Susie Baker

Synopsis: Act I, Scene 1, Barclay Street Ferry Slip, New York. Scene 2, In Front of Ferry House at Barclay Street. Scene 3, Battle Annie's Saloon. Scene 4, City Hall Square. Scene 5, Steamship Pier in Hoboken. Scene 6, The After Deck. Scene 7, Stateroom the S. S. Augusta Victoria. Scene 8, At Gates of Paris Exposition. Scene 9, Paris Exposition. Act II, Scene 1, City Room of the New York Herald. Scene 2, Stratosphere. Scene 3, Public Square, Moscow. Scene 4, Street in Aden. Scene 5, The Pass. Scene 6, Street in Aden. Scene 7, Somewhere in Texas. Scene 8, In Transit. Scene 9, Barclay Street Ferry Slip. The time, 1889.

New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 22, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

'Nellie Bly' a Lively and Zany Musical

I read somewhere that the comedy firm of Bill Gaxton and Victor Moore is going to dissolve after the run of "Nellie Bly," which opened at the Adelphi last night. Seems they each can make more money in Hollywood, with less grief, than in working as a team on Broadway.

If the Messrs. Nat Karson and Eddie Cantor have a run-of-the-play contract with the Messrs. Gaxton and Moore, I am afraid the poor boys—Bill and Vic—are stuck; they are going to keep on having to do their chore at the Adelphi for quite a spell, even if the dew and dough of the City of the Angels beckon sirenically.

"Nellie Bly" is the best vehicle they have had since the Pulitzer Prize winning "Of Thee I Sing" (1932) even if, on the road, the two original authors took their hats and left the show, refusing to allow their names to be used in any billing the musical comedy might receive. Two directors also walked out on it and three choreographers got temperamental and washed their hands of the whole affair.

A Funny Book.

What a great break for the Messrs. Gaxton and Moore and for the producers, the Messrs. Karson and Cantor, all that was! Two unknowns (at least to me), Joseph Quillan and Johnny Burke, stepped in and supplied an extraordinary funny book, giving that ingratiating comic, Victor Moore, every break in the world, even if they slight Mr. Gaxton slightly.

I am afraid I shall have to warn the easily shockable that Benay Venuta has a couple of songs in this show of which your pastor may not approve. But Miss Venuta is such a reserved and pious young lady herself that she puts these azure songs over as though they were hymns. Miss Venuta makes a noble effort to prevent you from hearing the words she is required to sing. This is gracious of her.

Typical Gag.

Do you know what made me an embarrassment to my wife, to my colleagues sitting nearby and to people who have more reserve than I have? It was this:

MR. GAXTON: You nincompoop!

MR. MOORE: Don't speak that way to me; we nincompoops are organized now.

Maybe that isn't funny to some; but it was funny to 99/100th of the persons at the Adelphi last night. They laughed their heads off (as the saying goes).

The book, as re-written by Mr. Quillan, is full of wit and humor. "Nellie Bly" is an old-fashioned musical comedy. It hasn't any social significance or any plot to speak of. It has, instead, pretty girls, two of the best comedians in theater business, dances arranged mostly in the manner that obtained before the influence of the ballets of Mr. Hurok punched great gaping holes in the fun of musical comedy. It is a musical comedy which has voluptuousness in costume, scenery, music, et cetera. It sends you away from the theater happy, contented and full of the celestial vitamins which good nonsense can supply.

Story of Newswoman.

The story is something about a newspaperwoman named Nellie Bly, who undertook to go around the world for Joseph Pulitzer in less time than Jules Verne, a fictionist, said it was possible in "Around the World in 80 Days." There is something about the rivalry of Mr. Gaxton who was in love with Nellie (Joy Hodges) but worked for the Herald. He thought he could work up a great scoop if he got a Tammany politician (Mr. Moore) to go around the world quicker.

Lubov Roudenko, the prima ballerina of the show, gets a bad break. I am speaking from the masculine point of view. My wife said she didn't notice it. In one choreographic number, Miss Roudenko is given a background of six can-can dancers, so dressed by Mr. Karson that it was hard for me to keep my eye on Miss Roudenko, who seems to give, with Jack Whitney, quite an acrobatic ballet performance. . . . Miss Hodges is pretty, curvaceous and lively. Miss Venuta gives of her best.

Aside from the two stars, my highest plaudits must go to those tap-dance precisionists, who call themselves the Debonairs and who talk with their toes and heels. They are marvelous.

The Sun

JANUARY 22, 1946

'Nellie Bly,' With Gaxton and Moore, Big, Costly and Completely Lifeless.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Those waggish fellows, William Gaxton and Victor Moore, haven't done it this time. They're back in the New York theater in a period-piece musical play, "Nellie Bly," put on last evening at the Adelphi by Nat Karson and Eddie Cantor. This new show lags, drags and fairly crawls as it provides a long, long trip around the world.

"Nellie Bly" is a musical comedy of many shortcomings. The score is routine and so are the lyrics. The book is wayward and quite dull. The material supplied Gaxton and Moore, who have given Broadway a great deal of fun over the past fifteen years, is pretty dreary stuff but it must also be admitted, and quite regrettably, that the old G. & M. act has worn somewhat thin.

The story of the Adelphi's new show is based upon the adventures of the impetuous newspaper woman who took the name of Nellie Bly and who, in November of 1889, on an assignment from the New York World, set out on an around-the-world jaunt that she completed in seventy-two days.

Now, upon the stage of the capacious playhouse in 54th street, the globe-trotting Nellie has a competitor—the diffident, overcautious, land-loving Phineas T. Fogarty, erstwhile ferry boat deckhand, who is put into the race by James Gordon Bennett's New York Herald. He gets seasick, he travels over a lot of Europe in a balloon, he has his troubles in a harem, and for all the actual entertainment the trip provides Nellie, Fogarty and everybody else might just as well have stayed in the Barclay street ferry slip.

The performances are by no means first-rate. William Gaxton, still brazen and jaunty and flashy of dress, doesn't seem to have his heart in it as he struggles to put life into the role of Frank Jordan, who accompanies the skittish Fogarty on the globe-circling expedition. Victor Moore, with his vague, fumbling, hesitant comedy style, has been one of America's most amusing actors for four decades but he isn't very successful in "Nellie Bly" and his authors have let him down dreadfully.

Edward H. Robins, once of "The Easiest Way" fame, puts on one set of whiskers as James Gordon Bennett and another as a sheik. Walter Armin doubles as a sheik and as Pulitzer. Joy Hodges has only a fair time as the roving Nellie. Perhaps the most spirited player on the Adelphi stage is Benay Venuta, playing Battle Annie. The Debonairs, a male group, turn in some neat dancing. The production has been elaborately costumed, and the scenery certainly runs into money, but it all seems a great waste.

"Nellie Bly" has frequent changes of scene but it doesn't get better as it goes along. It offers gags but no humor and must be put down as a costly, cumbersome, and completely lifeless show.

Journal and American

JANUARY 22, 1946

'Nellie Bly' Takes Off At Adelphi Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

For a while there, early in the opening stanza of "Nellie Bly," which, last night, fumbled its way across the stage of the Adelphi Theatre, we eternal optimists who go down to our seats on passes told ourselves that William Gaxton, fellow-star with Victor Moore, possibly could have been mistaken. Maybe this, his new song-and-dance show, would turn out to be praiseworthy!

Even actors aren't infallible. Maybe Mr. Gaxton had been in error when he told a member of the Drama Critics Circle that "Nellie Bly" was no show for critics, hastening to add that it was an "audience show," however. Never' in his on-stage life had William Gaxton heard so many "belly laughs" in one evening's entertainment. Relaxed in the Oak Room at the Plaza, Mr. G. was hopeful.

But, as last night's premiere wore on in the showshop Mr. Gaxton refers to as a "dump of dumps," we eternal optimists began to shed our optimism and the Adelphi began to shed its audience. Which is to report that "Nellie Bly" went from "perhaps" to "no," from "no" to "never." You soon came to understand why Eddie Cantor, co-producer, was already on his way home to Hollywood.

Rumors around 54th st. said that Spencer Tracy had been on hand to see Mr. Cantor off, that Guy Kibbee had promised to be on hand to greet him.

* * *

Seems Longer

The musical-comedy foundling Eddie Cantor left on the doorstep of the Adelphi Theatre is no credit to the unnumbered showshopmen who conceived it. The book by Joseph Quillan is unwise and witless. The lyrics by Johnny Burke are forced and feeble. The music by James van Heusen is tuneless and tiresome. And the choreography by Edward Caton and Lee Sherman just isn't!

Such story as there is follows feebly in the footsteps of the Nellie Bly who lends the piece her name. It was she, you will remember reading, who, in 1888 and under the promotional aegis of the New York World, set out to encircle the globe in 75 days. By so doing she discounted the record of Jules Verne's fictitious hero, who did it in 80 days and 500 pages.

Now, in the song-and-dance rearrangement, Nellie makes the round-trip from New York's Barclay st. ferry back to New York's Barclay st. ferry by way of Hoboken, a ship at sea, the Paris Exposition, the stratosphere, a public square in Moscow, a street in Aden, the city room of the New York Herald, and Texas. Throughout, she is pursued by Messrs. Moore and Gaxton.

It takes them the allotted number of days to make it. Seventy-five, I believe, is the historic number. Only, in 54th st., it seems a whole lot longer.

* * *

Globe Crawler

In the title role is Joy Hodges, pinch-hitting for the Marilyn Maxwell, who got out from under after Philadelphia. According to Who's Who, in the program, Miss Hodges is the only actress on the current stage who gets up at a quarter to seven in the morning. She could have stood in bed. The other almost leading-lady is Benay Venuta, who works hard with soft material.

The Debonairs are refugees from Earl Carroll's Theatre-Restaurant and Hollywood. Lubov Roudenko is a refugee from Leonid Massine's Ballet Russe and "Rodeo." Jack Whitney is a refugee from the USO's production of "Girl Crazy" and Olsen and Johnson. Edward Robins is a refugee from early Gaxton-Moore successes and "The Dough Girls." They all do what they can to keep their Nellie moving.

So do William Gaxton and Victor Moore. "Nellie Bly" is their eighth show together, counting, if I may mention it, an eddish number called "Hollywood 'Pinafore.'" Mr. Gaxton and Mr. Moore go through all the old familiar motions, and a few new unfamiliar ones, as if they knew their energies were being wasted, along with co-producer Nat Karson's handsome scenic set-up.

Oh, well, last night goes to prove that William Gaxton is a prophet with honor in the theatre. He said that "Nellie Bly" is not a critic's show. He can say that again!

PM

JANUARY 23, 1946

A Race That Nobody Won

PM Reviews
NELLIE BLY

Victor Moore and Billy Gaxton are squatting way out on a limb in *Nellie Bly*. It's a show they have virtually no chance to shine in and none whatever to save. Built on large and lavish lines, it proves hollow as a drum—one of those melancholy contraptions that just never come to life. The book is forever around and forever in trouble. The humor, except for what Mr. Moore can do with his bleating voice and timid, bewildered look, is mangy. The music is either ditty stuff that calls (in vain) for clever lyrics, or orchestration filling out a vacuum. The dancing, at even its most inspired, is no more than passably lively. The best thing in the show—which is probably the worst thing you can say about one—is one or two of the sets.

Obviously, a great many people have blundered, for the story of Nellie Bly has good enough musical possibilities. The gal reporter who raced round the globe for the N. Y. *World* to cap the 80-day record of Jules Verne's Phineas Fogg, could have made a good stage character. Beyond that, her trip allows for plenty of variety and period color, and imposes nothing shackling in the way of a plot. And since the very point of her trip was its speed, here was the signal for a really lickety-split show. Instead, *Nellie Bly* has been turned into an obstacle race, and bundled itself into a Winter overcoat of a plot. Since Victor Moore could hardly play Nellie Bly, he has been made to play a ferry-boat Milquetoast who races her around the world for the *Herald*. It's a very tedious competition.

Mr. Moore—now being seasick, now forced to go up in a balloon, now clad as a woman of the harem—coaxes a few amusing moments out of his indigent role. Mr. Gaxton, playing a *Herald* editor, is even harder put to it; and so is Joy Hodges as Nellie Bly. Benay Venuta works her arms off as a tough lady saloon-keeper, but she, too, I'm afraid, goes down to defeat. Lubov Roudenko, Jack Whitney and The Debonairs give the dancing what scattered bright moments it has. And some of Nat Karson's sets, as aforesaid, are bright enough. But they might more suitably be hung with crepe. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JANUARY 22, 1946

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Rough Voyage

THE talent and the trappings in "Nellie Bly" are quite sufficient for an engaging musical comedy romp. The redoubtable Victor Moore and William Gaxton head an impressive company in the new show at the Adelphi. Nat Carson, the co-producer, has done no skimping in mounting and designing it, taking an audience on a gaudy world tour in backgrounds and costumes of 1889, when the lady of the title accomplished her journalistic feat. All that is wanting is a bit of fresh comic invention or a tune to whistle. Without these valuable ingredients, the best efforts of the stars and all the fancy furnishings go to naught.

* * *

One is tempted to quote some of the lines of the show, stripped to their textual inanity, to define the crude outline of the libretto. The truth is that the jests are uniformly terrible and that the bits of business which support them are as moss-covered as any to be found in a third-rate Hollywood musical. Joseph Quillan, who perpetrated the plot, succeeds in getting Nellie Bly around the world in a race with the managing editor of a rival newspaper and a broken-down ferry slip attendant, but it is a rough voyage. Even with Moore trying to make fun where there is none by bouncing around in long woolen underwear or a harem girl's outfit, the proceedings are embarrassingly dull.

Gaxton and Moore have been so comically triumphant in the past that it is difficult to believe that they could be so completely tripped up by a show. There are moments when they almost get away from the libretto, notably the scene in which they are cruising over Europe in a runaway balloon, but the stuff of musical comedy nonsense just isn't there and all their wiles do not conceal the fact. Moore, being the more proficient buffoon, socks in a telling scene on occasion; Gaxton merely tries too hard and waits too long for laughs which are not forthcoming. Perhaps the best index to the lack of substance in "Nellie Bly" is the fact that the dance ensemble known as The Debonairs looks great every time it comes on in more or less familiar routines.

Joy Hodges has the title role. She is personable, if a bit shaky vocally. She is at her best doing a strip tease at the Paris Exposition, with can-can girls and assorted French atmosphere to set it off. Benay Venuta is rather better as the tough bar-tender who accompanies the land-locked Phineas Fogarty on a round-the-world expedition and Lubov Roudenko adds a nice extraneous bit with her ballet whirls. The music by James Van Heusen, is undistinguished, although "Just My Luck" is not bad and Johnny Burke's lyrics are definitely uninspired. Karson and his partner, Eddie Cantor, have all that it takes to make a gay tuneful jamboree except a passable book and score. It is a sad waste.

DAILY NEWS

JANUARY 22, 1946

'Nellie Bly,' or How to Encompass Eddie Cantor in One Long Evening

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Nat Karson, a very good scenery painter, and Eddie Cantor, a one-time Ziegfeld comedian, presented a musical titled "Nellie Bly" at the Adelphi Theatre last night. The stars were William Gaxton and Victor Moore. It was a more than ordinarily dull evening, and the only thing I really liked about it was Mr. Karson's backdrop representing the public square in Moscow. When a backdrop arouses my attention it is time for me to go home—which is what I did, with a short detour to the office to write this piece.

The story of the thing involves the girl whom Joseph Pulitzer assigned to steam around the world, throwing verbs and stuff into her furnace when ordinary fuel was lacking in order to beat the time set by a fiction writer named Jules Verne, who might in this day have been chief of staff of the air forces. The story is of no importance and I could not get aroused about it last evening.

Next on the agenda come Mr. Moore and Mr. Gaxton. These are two very engaging musical comedy men, but it is about time that producers stopped casting them as Alexander Throttlebottom and J. P. Wintergreen. The best of all musical comedies, "Of Thee I Sing," was presented at the Music Box in December, 1931, and it is hardly fair for managers to insist that Messrs. Gaxton and Moore continue to enact these roles at this late date.

The head manager, I gather from the radio spot announcements, is Eddie Cantor, who has been reminding people that he once worked for Ziegfeld. Sure he did, and he was pretty good, too. But Ziegfeld is no longer with us and Cantor has been in the movies and on the radio for so long that I have come to believe that he, too, has departed. Nothing that happened at the Adelphi last evening leads me to believe otherwise.

The people supporting Mr. Gaxton and Mr. Moore include Joy Hodges, Benay Venuta and four or six men called the Debonairs. Miss Venuta has one sprightly lyric titled "That's Class," and I suppose it's by Johnny Burke, who has written some amusing things. Jimmy Van Heusen, who wrote the music, has also done some good things—but not, apparently, of recent date.